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ABSTRACT

One of the goals of education in Canada is to prepare young people to participate in paid work, either as employees or self-employed. Many educators faced the challenge of preparing youth for the highly competitive and changing global marketplace by calling on employers to articulate and communicate their needs. In an attempt to address the changing skills needed to be successful in the workforce, the Conference Board of Canada developed an Employability Skills Profile, based on input from employers and validated by a wide range of stakeholders. Twenty-five major employers stated that employers in Canada were looking for people possessing the following traits: (1) ability to communicate, think, and continue to learn throughout life; (2) ability to demonstrate positive attitudes and behaviors, responsibility, and adaptability; and (3) ability to work with others. The Profile, which is presented as a table, has become a benchmark which educators, counselors, and businesses use to identify the foundational skills necessary for successful living. (RB)

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Employability Skills Profile: What Are Employers Looking For?

An ERIC Digest

by MaryAnn McLaughlin

1995

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MaryAnn McLaughlin

Overview

One of the goals of education in every province and territory in Canada is to prepare young people to participate in paid work: as employees or self-employed. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, both employers and educators were voicing similar concerns and looking for ways to work together to meet this goal. Employers faced enormous changes in a highly competitive global marketplace. The new economy demanded new ways of thinking, new ways of managing, and new ways of working. As the nature and tools of jobs changed, the level of education and skills required also changed. Many educators faced the challenge of preparing young people to participate in the increasingly complex and changing world of work by calling on employers to articulate and communicate their needs better.

A major project of the Conference Board of Canada's Corporate Council on Education was to identify and communicate the skills that they require as employers of half a million Canadians.

Discussion

The Process and the Product

The process began with a review of literature and unpublished reports about the mix of skills that employers expect to find in new recruits. Building on a framework of Academic, Personal Management, and Teamwork Skills used by a Michigan Employability Skills Task Force (1989), the Corporate Council drafted a list of skills in each category, based on the hiring criteria of the companies they represented. For simplicity, the Profile used the word "skills" to represent the set of characteristics that make a person employable, including knowledge, know-how, attitudes, and behaviors. One of the guiding principles in the Employability Skills Profile was that the skills needed for a high-quality Canadian work force now and in the future must be generic foundational skills rather than skills specific to certain occupations, levels of responsibility, or limited to today's jobs.

The next stage involved review of the draft Employability Skills Profile by other Canadian employers, including small business educators from all levels, labor, government, equity groups, and community groups. The review consisted of a questionnaire and meetings with about 100 human-resource professionals. There was strong agreement that this type of profile would be of significant value, offering national direction for all organizations and individuals concerned with education and training in Canada. There were also many suggestions for refinements in wording or further specification of skills already listed.

With the publication of the "Employability Skills Profile" in May 1992, 25 major employers stated that employers in Canada were looking for the following traits:

- People who can communicate, think, and continue to learn throughout their lives.
- People who can demonstrate positive attitudes and behaviors, responsibility, and adaptability.
- People who can work with others.

Employers stated that they placed equal emphasis on each of these characteristics and that the skills in each category were not listed in any order of priority. In the workplace, as in school, the skills were integrated and used in varying combinations, depending on the nature of the job.

In June 1992, the Conference Board conducted meetings with 200 representatives of stakeholder groups to address a central question: How close is this list to the overall foundation skills that young people need to develop in order to be fully participating members of society? These meetings were hosted by educators. They agreed that the profile outlined foundational skills that all Canadians should acquire in their formative years, to enhance citizenship, self-fulfillment, and employability or self-employment.

How is the Employability Skills Profile Used?

The Employability Skills Profile has been widely used by educators, employers, career counselors, as well as other interested organizations in Canada and other countries. In 1993-94, the Conference Board undertook a related study to respond to many requests for information on how to implement the profile. One of the key findings of a review of 225 partnerships, projects, and programs was that two major techniques help achieve the objective of developing students' employability skills: infusing the

skills into existing subject-specific curriculum, and adding a skills component to career preparation, work experience courses, or business-education partnership activities.

Summary

In an attempt to address the changing skills needed to be successful in today's workforce, the Conference Board of Canada developed an Employability Skills Profile, based on input from employers and validated by a wide range of stakeholders. The Profile has quickly become a benchmark which educators, counselors, and businesses use to identify the foundational skills necessary for successful living.

References

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EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS PROFILE: The Critical Skills Required of the Canadian Workforce

Academic Skills	**Personal Management Skills**	**Teamwork Skills**
Those skills which provide the basic foundation to get, keep, and progress on a job to achieve the best results	The combination of skills, attitudes, and behaviours required to get, keep, and progress on a job and to achieve the best results	Those skills needed to work with others on a job and to achieve the best results
Canadian employers need a person who can: **Communicate** - Understand and speak the languages in which business is conducted - Listens to understand and learn - Read, comprehend, and use written materials, including graphs, charts, and displays - Write effectively in the languages in which business is conducted **Think** - Think critically and act logically to evaluate situations, solve problems and make decisions - Understand and solve problems involving mathematics and use the results - Use technology, instruments, tools, and information systems effectively - Access and apply specialized knowledge from various fields (e.g., skilled trades, technology, physical sciences, arts, and social sciences) **Learn** - Continue to learn for life	Canadian employers need a person who can demonstrate: **Positive Attitudes and Behaviors** - Self-esteem and confidence - Honesty, integrity, and personal ethics - A positive attitude toward learning, growth, and personal health - Initiative, energy, and persistence to get the job done **Responsibility** - The ability to set goals and priorities in work and personal life - The ability to plan and manage time, money, and other resources to achieve goals - Accountability for actions taken **Adaptability** - A positive attitude toward change - Recognition of and respect for people's diversity and individual differences - The ability to identify and suggest new ideas to get the job done–creativity	Canadian employers need a person who can: **Work with Others** - Understand and contribute to the organization's goals - Understand and work within the culture of the group - Plan and make decisions with others and support the outcomes - Respect the thoughts and opinions of others in the group - Exercise "give and take" to achieve group results - Seek a team approach as appropriate - Lead when appropriate, mobilizing the group for high performance This document was developed by the Corporate Council on Education, a program of the National Business and Education Centre, The Conference Board of Canada. This profile outlines foundation skills for employability. For individuals and for schools preparing for work or employability as one of several goals, all of which are important for society.

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